

Allegory, Gendered Allegory, and *Paradise Lost*

Research Thesis

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Chapter 1: The Allegory of Sin and Death in Paradise Lost

Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit
 Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast
 Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
 With loss of *Eden*, till one greater Man
 Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,
 Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top
 Of *Oreb*, or of *Sinai*, didst inspire
 That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,
 In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth
 Rose out of *Chaos*: or if *Sion* hill
 Delight thee more, and *Siloa's* Brook that flow'd
 Fast by the Oracle of God; I thence
 Invoke thy aid to my adventurous Song,
 That with no middle flight intends to soar
 Above th' *Aonian* mount, while it pursues
 Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime.
 ...

That to the highth of this great Argument
 I may assert Eternal Providence
 And justifie the wayes of God to men. (1. 1-26)¹

These lines, which are some of the most powerfully comprehensive in all of English poetry, are the first lines of John Milton's Christian epic, *Paradise Lost*. As an introduction they represent Milton's argument perfectly, proposing "first in brief, the whole Subject." The entirety of this epic's effort is visible in these lines: describing the fall of Adam and Eve with the hope of later salvation. Right from the start Milton fully reveals his intention of expounding the true nature of our fall and justifying it to men, and for first-time readers of *Paradise Lost*, this is the poem's abstract. Readers can see moments of Genesis and Milton's other biblical sources in these lines, such as the source of all our woe: Death. Here Milton emphasizes the result of our disobedience, that the seemingly immortal mankind should suffer death instead of eternal bliss in Eden. This moment is a direct allusion to Genesis, where the concept of death first appears in chapter 2:17,

¹ Throughout, I quote Roy Flannagan's edition of *Paradise Lost*, in *The Riverside Milton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.)

which states “for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”² Milton plays with this idea of Death throughout the poem, but, for initial readers, the first lines do not indicate just how much Milton plays with his source material.

For second or third time readers however, the suggestion that Adam and Eve’s disobedience “brought Death into the world and all our woe” implies something more than just Genesis 2:17. This line, instead of simply referring to the Bible, could instead foreshadow the allegorical character of Death introduced in Book II. If so, then line three might also foreshadow Death’s entrance into Eden in Book X, after the Fall. That moment is when “all our woe” is realized, when the bridge from Hell to Paradise is wrought “too fast...And durable” (10. 319-320). Why did Milton introduce this allegorical figure who erects a bridge, considering this narrative has no precedent in Genesis? This biblical play raises another question for returning readers though: the allegory of Death is present in both of these moments, but he is present there and throughout the rest of the poem with another figure: his mother and sister, Sin. Based on the biblical material, Sin should not be part of the subsequent narrative of *Paradise Lost*. Genesis does not introduce the word ‘sin’ until the Cain and Abel story, which Milton does not invoke until Michael’s speech in Book XI. To Cain, God says “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee *shall be* his desire, and thou shalt rule over him” (4:7). This ‘sin’ seems allegorical because of its reclined position (“sin lieth at the door”), but it seems more bestial than human. It is when readers reach Sin and Death’s introduction in Book II that Milton’s narrative begins truly to diverge from Genesis, and instead of the Bible, Milton’s scriptural elaboration becomes the focus of the poem.

² For Bible quotations, I use Robert P. Carroll and Stephen Prickett’s edition of *The Bible: Authorized King James Version* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008).

Even so, why then would Milton include, in this poetic theodicy, allegorical characters embodying Sin and Death? Why would he not maintain his apparently mimetic mode, and “justify the ways of God to men” by means of plain biblical exegesis (1. 26)? Milton is notoriously dense and poetic in this poem, which confuses readers more than it “justifies” God to men. It is from this confusion that I will attempt to justify the ways of Milton to men. His use of allegory has prompted years of investigation and debate: partially because of the perception that allegory has been declining since Spenser, and partially because of the unique and complex allegory that Milton composed. In this chapter, I want to explore Milton’s allegories of Sin and Death, marking the places where the allegories succeed, and the moments where the allegories seem to break. It is my contention that Milton crafts a distinct allegorical mode for *Paradise Lost*: a mode that would not work in any other text of this size and weight. In order to address these moments and support my assertion, I will begin with an outline of allegory’s historical reception since the eighteenth century. I will then use the history of the reception of allegory to craft my own reception of Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost*.

The questions of ‘why allegory’ is a legitimate question, but an unproductive one. Allegory as a concept can have three different uses, and these uses vary depending on the writer or the reader. Gordon Teskey, in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, describes allegory “(1) as an entire work of art, ‘**an** allegory’; (2) as a pattern of images, ‘an allegory **of**’; and (3) as arbitrary interpretation, where something is read ‘**as** an allegory’ of something else” (Teskey). From these definitions, a reader can see that allegory has a range of uses: allegory can be a tool used by writers during composition or by readers as an interpretive technique. The OED only defines allegory with regard to the writer, as “the use of symbols in a story, picture, etc., to convey a hidden or ulterior meaning, typically a moral or political one; symbolic representation,”

limiting allegory to an intentional strategy. Authors do utilize allegory intentionally, in the cases of the medieval morality plays and *The Faerie Queene* (1590), but unintentional allegory seems to have so much interpretive potential as well. In this way, providing a comprehensive understanding of allegory is difficult, because there are too many uses of the possible definitions. The etymology of allegory comes closer to being useful: allegory is a portmanteau of *allos*, meaning ‘other,’ and *agoreuein*, meaning ‘open speech’ (Fletcher 2, fn.1). Together, allegory becomes a term which openly says one thing, and means another. The etymology does not allow for the Teskey’s idea of allegory though, which indicates that allegory can be a rhetorical tool or a hermeneutic technique; instead the etymology implies the opposite of the OED: that allegory is a reader’s interpretation of a text. A popular example of reader-invoked, hermeneutic allegory would be the Song of Solomon in the Bible. Christian and Jewish scholars for centuries have attempted to allegorize these textually erotic love poems, and Christian scholars allegorize the poems as a relationship between Christ and the Church. Despite these interpretations, there is no indication that one must read it with Christian morals in mind. Whether the confusion surrounding allegory arises from the indefinite definition, or this issue of allegorical reading versus writing, allegory remains a complex concept with a more complex history of reception.

In his 1962 book, *The Muse’s Method*, Joseph Summers analyzes Milton’s allegory, categorizing it as biblical accommodation. Milton invoked accommodation throughout his work in order to accurately “justifie the wayes of God to men” and Summers elaborates, saying: “The doctrine of God’s accommodation of His truth to human understanding made the reading of the Scriptures for a seventeenth-century man both complex and exciting” (Summers 40). Accommodation is not allegory per se, but it does overlap with allegorical interpretation in the way that Milton uses it. For example, one of Summers’ major claims is that Satan, Sin, and

Death are parodic in *Paradise Lost* as the unholy trinity. His description of their allegory focuses on the contrast between Heaven's reality and Hell's unreality, accommodating Heaven's essence in a fallen way that readers will understand. His description also epitomizes the essence of allegorical reading: the reading of Scripture mimics reading Satan, Sin, and Death "as an allegory" because allegories conflate the literal with the figural, the figural with the literal. Summers' approach to this claim is integral to his overall argument, though, because he positions himself against the unavoidable influence of eighteenth century critics. For Milton studies in particular, eighteenth century critics are inseparable from the reception and understanding of allegory, because their opinions have shaped later criticism. Summers situates his position against a couple of eighteenth century figures because his claim differs so drastically from eighteenth century perceptions of the poem, but those perceptions still influence critiques of allegory today.

Paradise Lost was written in a period of theological and political turmoil, and for literary critiques, this turmoil meant reconfiguring appropriate literary techniques. Even before *Paradise Lost*, allegory was already declining as a rhetorical tool and hermeneutic technique, so works like *The Faerie Queene* were being scrutinized for their allegory as a judgment of quality. This perception of quality stems from the theological disagreement regarding allegoresis, or the allegorical interpretation of scripture (an example being the allegorical interpretation of Song of Solomon). With the Reformation and the rise of scientific empiricism, theologians began to question the implications of allegory and its hidden messages (Copeland and Struck 8). From a biblical standpoint, Protestants literally read scripture, whereas reading the Bible allegorically emphasizes a duality of meaning, saying something and meaning something else. Protestantism deplored this duality of meaning in the Bible, emphasizing the literal truth of scripture instead. In

Luther's words: *sola scriptura* and *solus sensus litteralis* (Cummings 177). Brian Cummings, who compares and contrasts Protestantism and allegory, describes the Protestant reception of allegory as a division between "medieval obscurantism and Renaissance clarity" (178). He then expounds this perception to complicate the assumptions about allegory, saying that even Luther accepted intrinsic allegory, "when Scripture itself intends the allegory," and concludes his chapter by redeeming Protestant reception of allegory (179). His most cogent claim emphasizes the elusive nature of language proper: no matter how literal language seems, the figural always gets in the way (185). Despite Cummings' argument, the historical reality of the Protestant reception of allegory was harsh. In the eighteenth century, readers can see literal/figural critiques of allegory in the commentaries of Joseph Addison and Samuel Johnson, who agree with Milton's literal goal of explaining God's way to men, but disagree with the figural use of Sin and Death in the theodicy. Thus, Protestantism set the stage for the continuing distrust of allegory which then affected the next literary epochs.

The first eighteenth century critic to express these Protestant concerns about allegory was Joseph Addison. In Addison's 1712 publication of *The Spectator*, he reviewed and commented on the technique and form of *Paradise Lost*. For much of the review Addison's laudatory tone drives his support for Milton's project with regard to its genre, for he categorizes the poem as a heroic epic, and "assumes that every parallel which he can discover between the earlier epics and Milton's, or between Milton's practice and neoclassical theory is an unquestioned aesthetic mark in Milton's favour" (Summers 33). He places the epic on the highest pedestal, calling it "the greatest Production, or at least the noblest Work of Genius, in our language" (No. 321). Addison wanted *Paradise Lost* to be the best the English language had to offer, but Addison could not praise everything in the poem, because Milton did admit "imperfections" into his work. One of

these imperfections is Milton's introduction of Sin and Death, which Addison attributes to the lack of characters in the story (No. 273). Nevertheless, Addison disagrees with the allegories because they do not fit his definition of heroic epic. Specifically, his concerns lay with the agency of the allegories, and their position as actors in the poem, which for Addison, conflicts with the genre and Milton's biblical sources. Heroic epics are supposed to be credible, and Sin and Death are too imaginary to be credible. Addison's entire analysis is focused on genre, but his theory regarding Sin and Death builds from the Protestant distrust of allegory. The particular issue he addresses deals with the agency and reality of Sin and Death beginning in Book II. Addison concludes that they are not probable as agents, and that "the plain literal Sense ought to appear probable" (No. 314). Again, Addison's theory relies on a "plain literal Sense" of Protestantism that is not possible with the dual-meanings of allegory.

Addison's commentary on the poem has affected later receptions of its allegory, but Samuel Johnson, another eighteenth century critic, set the standard for subsequent theories of allegory, especially Milton's allegory. Johnson, who is most famous for his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), wrote a series of biographies, which he compiled into his *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*. John Milton's biography is one of the more famous by Johnson, and one of the more critically scathing. It begins by outlining Milton's life, which Johnson vituperates frequently. At one point he criticizes Milton's political position, saying:

Milton's republicanism was, I am afraid, founded in an envious hatred of greatness, and a sullen desire of independence; in petulance impatient of control, and pride disdainful of superiority...It is to be suspected, that his predominant desire was to destroy rather than establish, and that he felt not so much the love of liberty as repugnance to authority. (43)

Despite some of Johnson's more harsh judgments of Milton's personal life, Johnson is not entirely critical of Milton's poetic prowess. In his discussion of *Paradise Lost*, Johnson actually praises the gravity of Milton's goal, saying that "before the greatness displayed in Milton's poem

all other greatness shrinks away” (47). After the biography section though, Johnson begins to comment on Milton’s early works, particularly attacking Milton’s more poetic moments. For example, Johnson attacks the imagery in Milton’s *Lycidas*, saying: “of [*Lycidas*], the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers unpleasing. What beauty there is we must therefore seek in the sentiments and images. It is not to be considered as the effusion of real passion; for passion runs not after remote allusions and obscure opinions” (44). Despite moments of praise, Johnson continues his defamatory tone throughout his examination, until it climaxes in the section on *Paradise Lost*. Johnson drops a critical bomb on Sin and Death when he says that their allegory is “undoubtedly faulty” (51). This statement is problematic because, by asserting that Milton’s allegory is faulty, Johnson has provided a critical precedent to ignore, to refute, and to erase Sin and Death from subsequent analyses of the poem. Johnson’s reasoning for censuring Sin and Death depends on their figural function and their agency, which is similar to Addison’s reasoning. According to Johnson it is an inconvenience to the reader that Milton, through his use of “immaterial agents” in the form of Sin and Death, justifies “absurdity.” Thus he denounces their agency and purpose as a poetic fault (51). This issue of agency is not limited to Sin and Death either. Johnson thought that it was also inconvenient that Milton ascribes agency to the angels because that “requires a description of what cannot be described,” but he saw this as defensible based on their necessity as characters (51). In general, Johnson’s analysis of *Paradise Lost* builds from Addison’s influence and Protestant influences, but the clarity and frankness of Johnson’s criticisms have influenced subsequent interpretations of the poem’s major “flaws.” Specifically, the Romantics inherited this historical reception of allegory in the following literary epoch, and incorporated Addison and Johnson’s opinions into their theory of transcendentalism.

The Romantics, especially Coleridge, disapproved of allegory and allegorical personifications because they conflicted with transcendentalism and “organic” form.³ The transcendent imagination held particulars and universals as compatible: their meanings intertwine to create coherent symbols. For Coleridge, a symbol consists of a synecdochic relationship between the idea and the symbol (Fletcher 17). In this way, allegory was demoted to instances or symbolic relationships in which logic and imagination conflicted: allegory is not an “organic” symbol, but a “mechanic” one. Furthermore the Romantics considered allegory to be a tenuous connection between the literal and figural, and Coleridge completely rejects the narrative agency of allegory (something that Johnson and Addison disliked as well). He sees the narrative agency of allegory as contrary to the reality of persons and histories, so that instances of allegory point to a person or history that is less than real. This theory in particular resonates with the earlier criticisms of Addison and Johnson regarding the reality of Sin and Death in the poem. For Protestant thinkers, the dislike of allegorical reality—of trying to make an abstraction material—reflects the Romantics’ disdain for mechanic imagery; Coleridge desired organic truth through symbols, and not artificial allegory. In modern examinations of allegory, there is a sense that allegory has maintained its mechanic association from the Romantics and its “faulty” association from the eighteenth century: now it seems that the critical instinct for allegory is to “revitalize” it or deconstruct it.

From this historical outline of allegory, I can return directly to Milton, and two influential 20th century articles that analyze the ontology of Sin and Death. The first article, “‘Real or Allegoric’: The Ontology of Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost*” by Philip J. Gallagher was published in 1976. This article is an apt example of revitalizing allegory, because Gallagher

³ This paragraph is indebted to Theresa M. Kelly’s chapter “Romanticism’s Errant Allegory” and Angus Fletcher’s *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*. These scholars were useful in that they outline Coleridge’s conception of allegory and the reception from the Romantics, which ideologically follows Addison and Johnson.

raises the question of ontology—the nature of being or existence—with regard to allegory. Gallagher wants to claim that Milton’s allegories are physical and historical (“consistently real”) throughout the epic, and that they have ontological status (317); they are actual agents in the poem. Based on those earlier ideas of allegory, this claim is radical: it is a direct contradiction to the perceptions of allegory which never ascribed existence to abstractions, and it argues that Sin and Death are historically real based on their mythology. In other words, Gallagher’s historical argument states that “*Paradise Lost* offers its narrative of these personifications as the definitive account of their origins” (318). He supports this argument by comparing the plausibility of Greek mythology and the perception that pagan gods were devils. His ontological argument relies on the foundational historical argument, claiming that pagan mythology is “real” and that Milton “really” rewrote pagan mythology into a Christian mythology.

In 1987, Stephen M. Fallon responds to Gallagher’s article, along with Maureen Quilligan’s *Milton’s Spenser: The Politics of Reading*⁴. His response claims to combine the theses of Gallagher and Quilligan, but his use of Gallagher’s article is simply destructive: the only aspect of Gallagher’s argument that Fallon redeems is “the literal truth of Milton’s narrative” (329). Where Gallagher tries to revitalize Milton’s allegory, Fallon sees Milton’s allegory as insubstantial. Fallon’s refutation of Gallagher hinges on the ontological status of allegory, which Fallon claims to be nothing: Sin and Death have no existence. He bases his argument on the Augustinian idea of evil, which insists “that evil is not an entity but privation (*privatio*) of entity” (330). Throughout his entire article, Fallon aligns Milton’s perception of evil with this Augustinian theology. He also constructs an outline of the reception of allegory starting, unsurprisingly, with Coleridge. Fallon’s idea of allegory is consistent with the

⁴ Fallon, Stephen M. "Milton's Sin and Death: the Ontology of Allegory in *Paradise Lost*." *English Literary Renaissance*. 17.3 (1987): 329-350. Print.

eighteenth century critics and the Romantics, but his outline also includes medieval Platonic and Aristotelian realism in order to emphasize the severity of the division between what earlier writers did with allegory, and what Milton did. This division hearkens to Brian Cumming's chapter on Protestant allegory, applying the divide between "medieval obscurantism and Renaissance clarity" to Milton's allegory. Fallon sees this divide as a productive way of reading Milton's theology, but Cumming's statement emphasizes this divide as a "narrow and reductive division" (178). In fact, Fallon claims that Milton's Sin and Death are not actual characters in the epic, but metaphysical ideas; they are there only to allegorize the separation of Satan from God, and any moment of allegoric agency in the poem is only an exhibition of God's power and Satan's impotency. For example, Fallon claims that Sin does not actually open the gates to Hell; instead God opens the gates himself. In other words, Sin and Death are illusions in the narrative, and at any point that the reader thinks otherwise, the reader is wrong. One could visualize Fallon's claim on a line: at one end is metaphysical good, next is moral good, then moral evil, and finally metaphysical evil. Based on Fallon's conceptualization, the characters of the poem would be ordered as such: God, Son/Angels, Satan/Fallen Angels, Sin/Death, respectively. Fallon believes that Milton is following this schema, and aligns Milton's Sin and Death with metaphysical evil and non-reality.

Despite Gallagher's attempt to revitalize allegory, Fallon returns the Sin and Death conversation to the eighteenth century and the Romantic's distrust of real abstractions. Like Fallon, most scholars seem to agree obligingly with Johnson's censure of allegory in *Paradise Lost*. To me, this regression has stunted the growth of Milton criticism, and skewed the purpose of Sin and Death in the poem. Every analysis of Sin and Death that criticizes their purpose as allegory wants to erase these characters in some capacity. What does erasing Sin and Death do?

The only productive answer seems to be shift the cause of evil from God to Satan, thus overstepping the problem of evil. The problem of evil is a major concern in the poem though, and one that still plagues philosophy and theological debates in academia and beyond. By allowing Sin and Death to traverse Chaos into Eden by God's will, there is the possibility that the existence of evil on Earth could be God's fault. Most theologians, including Milton, did not want to attribute evil to God, so Milton scholars like Fallon attempt to remove Sin and Death from the poem in some capacity: both Addison and Johnson make a similar move by suggesting that Milton erred with the introduction of allegory in the poem, but they did not suggest erasing them from the poem. Despite the gravity of the problem of evil, Sin and Death's lines compose most of Book II, and they seem to have influence at other points of the poem as well: erasing Sin and Death does not seem to be a productive move. Not only would removing Sin and Death leave gaps in the poem, this strategy would also undermine the larger effect these allegories have later in the narrative. Scholars like Fallon and Gallagher have stimulating readings of the more contentious moments, but I want to reconsider the allegory of Sin and Death as a whole: I would like to redefine Milton's allegories, and construct an interpretation of Sin and Death that considers their influence on the rest of the poem. This strategy is not new, but my analysis will focus specifically on Sin and Death, and not only their relationship to Satan.

From the introduction of Sin and Death in Book II, the reader has reason to interpret Sin and Death as separate from Satan despite the fact that they are "family." Satan approaches the gates of Hell and after addressing Death, and hesitating because of Sin, says:

So strange thy outcry, and thy words so strange
 Thou interposest, that my sudden hand
 Prevented spares to tell thee yet by deeds
 What it intends; till first I know of thee
 What thing thou art, thus double-form'd, and why
 In this infernal Vaile first met thou call'st

Me Father, and that Fantasm call'st my Son?
 I know thee not, nor ever saw till now
 Sight more detestable than him and thee. (2. 737-745)

On a literal level, Satan does not know who these creatures are, and is surprised by Sin's claim of generation. One could read this as another moment of Satan being disingenuous about his knowledge, or, as a first time reader, one could simply be startled by this scene, as I was. Who are these gatekeepers: the grotesque woman and the numinous shadow, and why does the woman stop Satan from attacking his "Son"? At this point in the narrative we do not even know the names of these characters. Only when Sin describes her genesis and Death's Hell-shaking birth do we learn their names. From their names, we seem to be encountering personifications, which are the allegorical literalizations of abstract concepts. Sin and Death fit that categorization, but upon closer examination they are different from typical personification.

Before we learn Sin's name, her appearance is described as a

Woman to the waste, and fair,
 But ended foul in many a scaly fould,
 Voluminous and vast, a Serpent arm'd
 With mortal sting: about her middle round
 A cry of Hell Hounds never ceasing bark'd
 With wide *Cerberian* mouths full loud, and rung
 A hideous Peal; yet, when they list, would creep,
 If aught disturb'd thir noyse, into her woomb,
 And kennel there, yet there still bark'd and howl'd,
 Within unseen. (2.648-659)

Sin's characterization combines with her cephalic birth from Satan to make a chimeric allegory.

Sin is a mutant of allusions, all of which dis-figure any direct literary reference. In her character, you can clearly see Hesiod's Athena, Spenser's Errour, Ovid's Scylla and Narcissus, and St.

James: Sin sprang out of Satan's head like Athena out of Zeus; she is half woman, half snake like Spenser's Errour; the dogs around her waist allude to the dogs around Scylla's waist; Satan lusts after Sin because she is in his image, like Narcissus' reflection; and James 1:15, "Then when lust

hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death,” is first to describe the etiology of sin. These allusions have been criticized by scholars in a variety of ways, one of which is Johnson’s infamous critique that Milton’s allegory was “a work too bulky for ideal architects” (*Lives* 51). Milton’s allegory of Sin is bulky, but her bulkiness is actually a useful quality, as opposed to a limiting one. Part of this utility arises with the extent to which Sin is an allusion to something else. When we learn that she sprung out of Satan’s head like Athena, the allusion stops there: with the birth of Sin as “a Goddess arm’d,” the angelic host recoils at her presence and deems her “a Sign/ Portentous” (2. 757-761). This is not a complete allusion to Athena’s cephalic birth then, for Sin’s becoming seems to be a perversion of the allusion, which is often how allusion actually functions. The allusion to Errour is similarly broken: The half woman, half serpent of *The Faerie Queene* is more monster than woman. Errour does not speak in Canto I, but she hisses and vomits books and papers (*FQ* 1.1.20). Sin on the other hand does not vomit, but sweetly pacifies Satan with her polite diction.⁵ With a chimeric combination of allusions that actively vivify the characterization of Sin, her personification is exempt from the stereotype that personification allegory is “wooden, tedious, obvious, simple, and juvenile” (Paxson 1). Instead, we can see Sin’s personification as more colorful and fluid because of her bulky allusions that complicate single interpretations.

Death, by this description, has a very different characterization:

The other shape,
If shape it might be call’d that shape had none
Distinguishable in member, joynt, or limb,
Or substance might be call’d that shadow seem’d,
For each seem’d either; black it stood as Night,
Fierce as ten Furies, terrible as Hell,
And shook a dreadful Dart; what seem’d his head

⁵ For a more detailed description of the parodic, courtly tone between the Unholy Trinity, cf. Joseph H. Summers’ chapter “Satan, Sin, and Death” in *The Muse’s Method* (1962).

The likeness of a Kingly Crown had on. (2.666-673)

Unlike Sin, Death seems to allude to only one source—John’s account of Death’s conquest in Revelation (6:2, 8), and this allusion does not break like Sin’s. Instead, Milton expands the allusion to Revelation, and reconfigures the horseman to be as shadowy and mysterious as his power. Most illustrations of Death are unable to capture his umbral figure, which isn’t surprising. How does someone visualize a substance that has no distinguishable joints, but is able to carry a spear, wear a crown, and rape his mother/sister? Milton has designed this personification to be paradoxical: Death is not a literalization of an abstraction because it is still abstract, but the reader can somehow still visualize Death speaking to and threatening Satan.⁶

Similarly, at the moment when there is a legitimate possibility that Death could kill Satan and end this whole debacle, the question of allegorical agency arises. In this scene, Satan arrives at the gates of Hell, and Death outs him as the “Traitor Angel:”

Who first broke peace in Heav’n and Faith, till then
Unbrok’n, and in proud rebellious Arms
Drew after him the third part of Heav’ns Sons
Conjur’d against the highest, for which both Thou
And they outcast from God, are here condemn’d
To waste Eternal dayes in woe and pain? (2. 689-695)

Satan is already condemned to Hell, but Death’s speech also condemns him to his eternal punishment, or at least reminds him of it. This moment is jarring for those who want to align Death with Satan because Death seems particularly adverse to the alignment. Death is the self-proclaimed “King and Lord” of Hell, and his threat to defeat Satan, and defend his post is potent (2.699). Before they attack each other, our Narrator interjects:

For never but once more was either like
To meet so great a foe: and now great deeds

⁶ Death’s existence is also fantastically oxymoronic: in Book II we learn about the “birth” of Death, and the fact that Death exists is also wonderfully weird.

Had been achiev'd, whereof all Hell had rung,
 Had not the Snakie Sorceress that sat
 Fast by Hell Gate, and kept the fatal Key,
 Ris'n, and with hideous outcry rush'd between. (2.721-726)

This strange observation foreshadows Satan and Death's respective battles with the Son, but also implies that the battle actually happened ("and *now* great deeds/ had been achiev'd" emphasis mine). The Narrator then retracts the implication and introduces the agency of Sin, who stops the attack. This moment is particularly crucial for the introduction of Sin and Death's agency, because here, both personifications have the power to affect the rest of the narrative. Death's attack is potent enough to actually defeat Satan, but it is Sin who stops the battle. Her intervention allows Satan to reassess his plan, and seduce them to his side.

This scene also introduces Sin's more relevant agency: she holds the key to Hell's gates, and as the portress, she alone has the power to unlock the gates. During her fall into Hell, this former "Goddess arm'd" was given the key "with charge to keep/ These Gates for ever shut, which none can pass/ Without my op'ning" (2.757, 775-777). Here Milton seems to imply that, not only does Sin have agency, but she also has the same gift of free will that the other actors have. She was charged with a task (given to her by God) to keep the gates forever shut, but the line "without my op'ning" adds a qualification to the charge that implies choice: more specifically, free will. One could disagree with her power on the basis that she cannot close the gates again: this is beyond her ability. This limitation does not seem to matter in the progression of the narrative, though, because there does not seem to be a moment where Sin would want to close the gates again. After Satan promises to give her reign over Earth, she seems eager to leave and never return. This decision only furthers her from God; her free will remains intact.

Returning now to the unique characterization of the personification allegories, and their capacity for agency, the question of ontology resurfaces. Stephen Fallon's argument does not

assign Sin and Death ontological status, but his assignment is based on Augustinian theology which aligns evil with non-entity. No one can say for sure that Milton applied this theology to his poem, but we do have evidence of darkness which is “visible,” and evil thoughts amongst the angels in Heaven: Mammon’s “looks and thoughts/ Were always downward bent, admiring more/ The riches of Heav’ns pavement, trod’n Gold” (I. 63, 680-682). Instead, the theology of the poem seems to align Sin and Death with the fallen angels, but Sin is not quite an angel (she is instead a “Goddess”) and Death is Hell-born. Their ontology is complicated simply because of their position as personification allegories, but the pieces of this ontological puzzle seem to be rooted in Sin’s birth, pregnancy, and fall.

In Book II, we learn that Sin’s cephalic birth was in Heaven. Her shape resembles Satan’s, and during her time in Heaven, her countenance was bright and heavenly fair (2.756-257). Granted, Sin’s birth appears to be the result of Satan’s original conspiracy, but the reader could also interpret it as the origin of his conspiracy. The former version implicates Sin as already fallen, but the latter allows Sin to remain unfallen until the war. Nevertheless, both interpretations permit Sin to exist in an angelic form for a time before the war.

Let us then consider Sin’s initial angelic ontology and free will alongside God’s free will defense, which is: “They trespass, Authors to themselves in all/ Both what they judge and what they choose; for so/ I formed them free, and free they must remain,/ Till they enthrall themselves” (3.122-125). God’s gift of free will applies equally to everyone, thus it is applicable to Sin and her companion/son Death as characters in the poem. The ontological puzzle is not complete though, for Sin is not completely angelic, nor is she a fallen angel; her existence seems to be something less than angelic because her form is so mutated by her violent rape and the subsequent births of her dogs. In Fallon’s ontological argument, he does make the point that

Satan's angelic form is metaphysically good, so that he is not distorted by his fall; this is compared to Sin, whose body seems to be less than angelic, and mutates after the birth and rape by Death. Returning to God's defense, Sin's ontology seems to lie on a spectrum between angels and man, which supports her allegory and her narrative. God explains that "the first sort [Satan's hord] by thir own suggestion fell,/ Self-tempted, self-deprav'd: Man falls deceiv'd/ By the other first: Man therefore shall find grace,/ The other none" (3.129-132). On the ontological spectrum fallen angels are on one end, and man on the other. This spectrum includes the qualifications of temptation and redemption, as God indicates in his speech. Sin, based on the narrative is actually deceived by Satan, thus she is closer to man ontologically. She cannot align with man, though, once you consider the redemption aspect, because Sin cannot be redeemed. For Milton's ontological framework, free will is a given, so the differences arise when one considers the method of temptation, and the chance for redemption. There is no hope of redemption for Sin despite being tempted, so her ontology hovers somewhere in the middle.

The point when Satan tempts Sin, saying that he will "bring [her] to the place where [she] and Death/ Shall dwell at ease" is particularly important to her ontology because it also makes her more than evil (2. 840-841). Sin's genesis narrative actually describes her absence from the angelic war, which exempts her from the "self-tempted, self-deprav'd" qualification. While describing the war in Heaven and her coupling with Satan, her position seems secondary to the immediate action. Satan takes her sexually, and she describes the fall as "they fell...and in the general fall/ I also" (2.771, 773-774). She presents her fall as a result of the "general fall," separating herself from the disobedience of the fallen angels. This separation implies that the presentation of her key is an acknowledgment of her relative position to Satan, and a later point of comparison for Adam and Eve's "charge" in the Garden. She was born of Satan, but at this

point of the narrative, she seems free of blame, and falls with the rest of the host because of that relationship. This fall is not a moral one like Satan's, but a physical one that affects her ontology. It is not until Satan's seductive suggestion of freedom that Sin reconsiders her obligation to God, whom thus blameless forced her from Heaven, and her charge. She then realigns herself with Satan, and we see the fruits of Satan's temptation with the perversion of the Christian doxology at the end of her response: "Thy daughter and thy darling, without end" (2.870).⁷

Sin's ontology is a product of her narrative, but Death's ontology seems to be rooted in his unique birth. I have already discussed the characterization of Death: his abstract personification already lessens his ontological status compared to Sin's substantial form. On our ontological scale, Death then seems to slide closer to his fallen father/grandfather because he is exempt from redemption and his moment of self-temptation—when he lusts after his mother—occurs after his birth: his exemption from redemption is actually a function of his moment of self-temptation. When Death tears through Sin's womb into Hell, she flees from her monster, and he pursues. Sin speculates that Death's pursuit was more "inflam'd with lust than rage" (2.791). This is a strange speculation to say the least: visually Death is nothing more than a spectral shadow, and yet he is able to rape his mother out of lust. There seems to be a nod here to James 1:15 "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished bringeth forth death" but the verse does not accurately map onto this moment in Book II. The Bible verse indicates lust between Satan and Sin, but the phrase "when it is finished" seems to indicate that sin's existence is finished when death appears. The verse also excludes the progeny of Sin and Death's union; James never mentions the Hell Hounds. In Milton's narrative, Sin and Death are constantly together because, as Sin says, "for Death from Sin no power can separate" (10. 251). Another possible explication for Death's rape of Sin lies in a late medieval source that

⁷ The Christian doxology ends (in translation) "world without end, amen."

Milton probably referenced for this hellish drama. In John Gower's *Mirour de l'Omme*, he outlines the genealogy of the Devil, stating that:

Sin [the Devil's] daughter and Death his son were very dear to their father, for they resembled him very closely; and therefore, by his plan, in order to have more offspring, the mother espoused her child: they engendered seven daughters, who are the heirs of hell and have complete possession of the world." (6)⁸

This version is much closer to Sin's version, and gives a possible explanation for Sin and Death copulating: that Death rapes Sin in order to continue this evil genealogy. Again, this allusion breaks, though, since the Devil—Satan in Milton's version—wants his offspring to reproduce in *Mirour*, but in *Paradise Lost* Sin describes both the copulation, and the actual birth as painful and forced. Theologically, the Devil is not always the same entity as Satan, but Milton seems to be alluding to Gower's account more than the James verse.⁹ Nevertheless Death's sudden desire for his mother implicates him as "self-tempted, self-deprav'd," via his first act, and affects his ontology so that he has less of an existence than Sin.

In this way, both Death and Sin exhibit typical characteristics of personification which Milton redefines for the purpose of distinguishing Sin and Death from other characters and allegories. These personifications are not the same as the fallen angels, nor are they the nonentities that Fallon posits; they are Milton's reimagining of Hellish entities in the guise of allegory. For this purpose Milton composes his allegorical personifications in a way that allows him creative reign over his poetic cosmos. His allegories do not follow Teskey's definition of allegory, as being either a writing tool or interpretive method, and they definitely conflict with

⁸ In David Scott Kastan's edition of *Paradise Lost* (2005), his footnote glossing Book II, lines 752-758, mentions Gower as a possible allusion.

⁹ In the Hebrew Bible, *ha satan* literally means "the adversary" and is not synonymic with the "Devil" until later. Milton makes a similar move in *Paradise Lost*, for he doesn't call Satan, "devil" until Book III, line 613.

Johnson's opinion of allegorical agency.¹⁰ Harold Bloom, in his chapter "Milton and his precursors," applies his idea of "anxiety of influence" to Milton's methods of allusion; this anxiety could also be applied to his allegories. Milton's redefinition of allegory could be a way for him to "make his own belatedness into an earliness, and his tradition's priority over him into a lateness," but Milton does not seem particularly anxious about this earliness (Bloom 131). Instead, Sin and Death's allusions would then be before the beginning of history, and organically anticipate all of their allusions. Instead of Sin being a chimera of wicked female figures, she would be the first wicked female figure, and Error would be Spenser's degraded, monstrous version of her. In this way, Milton initializes allegory, and these "first allegories" fit Milton's cosmological schema based on the internal theology of the poem: everything is "in the beginning." Sin and Death, in this beginning, balance out the distribution of evil through their ontological status, and reiterate the universal nature of free will in a different capacity. Without these characters, the balance would be skewed towards a view that maintains that the allegory of Sin and Death is completely auxiliary to the narrative, and Milton's allegory would continue to be questioned, instead of being recognized as essential to *Paradise Lost*.

¹⁰ Teskey also introduces interpretive stages of allegory in his article; he lists as the stages: hermeneutic anxiety, interpretive play, and the narcosis of repose in the truth. Sin and Death's allegories definitely cause the first two, but I think their complex fun arises because there is no repose to their interpretive play. They continue to arrest the senses throughout the poem.

Chapter 2: Gendered Allegory and its Implications for Paradise Lost

Let us reconsider the first lines of *Paradise Lost*. In chapter one I discussed the absence of Sin from these lines, and the implications for Milton's retelling of the story with allegories. Milton's rendition of the Fall, with its scope and scale, requires a more complex cosmology, and one of the way he achieves that is by redefining allegory and situating his allegories "in the Beginning." Milton's allegories are first chronologically, and anticipate his predecessors' allegories, improving on their ontology and effect. In this way Milton has reimagined Sin and Death, not as passive personifications, but active characters in the Fall of man. Now, Sin is conspicuously absent from Milton's initial summary of his intention, and in a seemingly more important way, so are females in general. In the first twenty-seven lines, "Man" is mentioned twice, with emphasis on "Mans first Disobedience," and "one greater Man/ [who will] Restore us" (l. 1, 4-5). At this point, Sin's absence seems trivial, but where is Eve? She could be hiding in the plural sense of "Man," but the repetition of "Mans...Man" seems to imply just Adam and the Son. That being said, Milton does begin to summarize the narrative arc in his invocation to the Muse (ostensibly female), and refers to "our Grand Parents," and the "Mother of Mankind" (l.29, 36). These references definitely include Eve in the summary, but at this point in the poem, Milton is transitioning to Hell, and his focus is on "Th' infernal Serpent...whose guile/ Stird up with Envy and Revenge, deceiv'd" (l.34-35). We are not actually *introduced* to our Grand Parents, and more importantly Eve, until Book IV. What does this mean for the poem? Since Eve is not introduced at the opening of Book I, the first woman we meet in *Paradise Lost* is Sin.

Fast-forward to Book II: Satan flies to the gates of Hell and there he meets Milton's allegories, Sin and Death. As I emphasized in the last chapter, these allegories are particular to *Paradise Lost* because they help "justify the wayes of God to men", and to a greater extent,

challenge the form of allegory itself. Samuel Johnson, who despised Milton's allegories, proclaims that "Sin and Death are undoubtedly faulty... [and] when they stop the journey of Satan, a journey described as real, and when Death offers him battle, the allegory is broken" (51). For Milton, the allegory is already broken, because Sin and Death are necessarily real within the poem's cosmology. Satan's journey is real, and thus their interference is real as well. In this way, their allegorical agency is potent, and this potency is embodied by their physical forms. Death is a numinous shadow, but this shadow seems to pervert the imagery that spirits are

not ti'd or manac'd with joynt or limb,
Nor founded on the brittle strength of bones,
Like cumbrous flesh; but in what shape they choose
Dilated or condens't, bright or obscure,
Can execute thir aerie purposes,
And works of love or enmity fulfill." (1.426-431)

Death has no shape, or "distinguishable...member, joynt, or limb" or, as Michael describes, there are many shapes of Death by "Fire, Flood, Famin, by Intemperance more/ In Meats and Drinks" (2.667-668, 11.468, 473-474). Death is powerful, but his power comes from his instability. This instability of spirits is peculiar to Milton though, because it also involves a gendered quality: spirits "when they please,/ Can either Sex assume, or both; so soft/ And uncompounded is thir Essence pure" (1.423-425). Death has no discernable gender, though readers could just assume that he is male based on his assigned pronoun, and the fact that he rapes Sin. The assigned pronouns in *Paradise Lost* are actually masculine for almost all the characters, the exceptions being Sin and Eve.

Sin, based on her genesis, did exist in the form of a spirit before her fall into Hell, for she sprung out of Satan's head, "then shining heav'nly fair, a Goddess arm'd" (2.757). The spirits can either sex assume, but at her birth, Sin is the only spirit that assumes a female form: a "Goddess arm'd." All of the other spirits, both fallen and not, are assigned masculine pronouns

and masculine descriptions. Sin's female form in Heaven has a particular effect on the angelic host because she, "with attractive graces won/ The most adverse,"¹¹ and because Satan "becam'st enamour'd, and such joy [he] took'st/ With [her] in secret" (2.762-763, 765-766). Despite this moment in Heaven, her divine form does not last long (nor as long as the other fallen angels), for she recounts to Satan that

At last [Death] whom thou [Satan] seest
Thine own begotten, breaking violent way
Tore through my entrails, that with fear and pain
Distorted, all my nether shape thus grew
Transform'd." (2. 782-786)

Sin's spiritual form mutates into a corporeal one with the birth of Death, and during this process, her sex seems to solidify as well. This affair with Satan has tainted her "Essence," cursing her to lose the ability to "either Sex assume," which she should have maintained since she was born in Heaven. With this transformation, Sin provides context for Satan's original description:

The one seem'd Woman to the waste, and fair,
But ended foul in many a scaly fould
Voluminous and vast, a Serpent arm'd
With mortal sting: about her middle round
A cry of Hell Hounds never ceasing bark'd
With wide *Cerberian* mouths full loud, and rung
A hideous Peal" (2.650-656).

Line 650 may read one "*seem'd* Woman" (emphasis mine), but this should not affect her gender. In this initial description and elsewhere, Sin is only referred to as a woman, and because of this constant referral, she becomes the first woman in *Paradise Lost*, not Eve. Based on the timeline of the narrative, which is problematic in other ways, Eve has not yet been created, nor has the

¹¹ I read this line as "with attractive graces won/ The most adverse *to her*," because "amazement seise'd/ All the Host of Heav'n" and "back they recoild affraid/ At first, and call'd me *Sin*, and for a Sign/ Portentous held me" (2.758-761). All the Host of Heaven recoiled at her birth, but she still won over those who were most adverse to her. There is another possible reading of "most adverse" which refers to the angels in league with Satan. They are already "adverse," so Sin would naturally win them with her "attractive graces." Another reading could read "adverse" as modifying "graces" but, despite Milton's typically gnarly syntax, "adverse" still seems to be modifying the Host. I prefer the first reading because the earlier lines imply that the entire Host of Heaven (or most of it) was present for her birth.

reader met her. Instead, reader's first interaction with a Miltonic woman is Sin and her barking dogs.

The development of Sin as the first woman does not stop with her pronouns; Sin's entire physical characterization is based on female or feminized allusions and similes. Milton spends a lot of time comparing Sin's appearance to the "Night-Hag" who was associated with the Roman goddess Hecate (Flannagan 401 note). This comparison is entirely negative, for Milton emphasizes Hecate's identification with "the smell of infant blood" before Sin even begins speaking (2.664). This initial comparison emphasizes her grotesqueness, but this association is still distinctly female. Sin's physical allusions—the allusions which she embodies—reiterate the peculiarity of her allegory as one that is distinctly female. The story of Scylla involves a similar corporeal transformation (from woman to half-woman, half-monster), and she is transformed for similar reasons as Sin. Both women spurred the men who lusted after them: Scylla scorns Glaucus, and out of desperation requests that Circe make a spell to "make her share [his] will" (*Metamorphoses* 325). This plan doesn't quite work, and Circe curses Scylla with a lower-body of barking dogs. In a similar way, Death lusts after Sin, Sin flees, and the subsequent rape results in the barking dogs. The allusion to Athena works similarly, but Sin's existence as a "Goddess arm'd" is short-lived because of her forced fall from Heaven. The allusion to Errour is probably the most obvious based on her shape and form. In my previous chapter, I discussed the break in this particular allusion, emphasizing how Sin, despite the consistency in imagery, is a very different beast from Errour. Redcrosse Knight enters Errour's den:

But full of fire and greedy hardiment,
The youthfull knight could not for ought be staide,
But forth vnto the darksome hole he went,
And looked in: his glistering armor made
A litle glooming light, much like a shade,
By which he saw the vgly monster plaine,

Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide,
 But th' other halfe did womans shape retaine,
 Most lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdaine. (I.I.14)

Redcrosse Knight sees the snaky train before he identifies her other half as woman, and this effect persuades the reader that Errour is more monster than woman. Sin, on the other hand, does not warrant this effect; Satan sees Sin and blazons her appearance: “The one seem’d Woman to the waste, and fair,/ But ended foul in many a scaly fould/ Voluminous and vast” (2.650-652). Milton flips Spenser’s description, prioritizing Sin’s femininity, excluding grotesque descriptions like “lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdaine.” The enjambment between the first two lines also creates a very different effect¹². The reader reaches the end of line 650, and understands Sin to be “fair.” The movement to the next line draws the reader down her body, to her snaky trail that ends “foul.” Sin is only “foul” though, and her grotesque descriptions are not as terrifying as Errour’s. Despite the lack of grotesque language associated with Sin, her corporeal form is a chimera of wicked female figures. These allusions build upon each other, until Sin becomes the ultimate or—returning to Harold Bloom’s *A Map of Misreading*—the initial wicked female figure.

Because Sin’s physically is as overly grotesque like Errour’s, Milton constructs Sin as morally ambivalent as well. During Sin and Death’s episode in Book II, Sin does most of the talking. Death is more of a brute considering the way he threatens and insults Satan. Sin’s dialogue, on the other hand, reflects something more tame. In the way that Errour’s bestial bray accentuates her grotesque figure, Sin’s courtly discourse accentuates her female form, but contrasts with her snaky tail. Joseph Summers’ approaches this characterization by claiming that “the sudden reduction of action from civil, military, and mythological to the domestic is

¹² For more information on Milton’s enjambment, cf. Archie Burnett’s “‘Sense Variousl Drawn Out’: The Line in *Paradise Lost*” *Literary Imagination: The Review of the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics*, 5.I (2003): pp. 69-92.

essentially comic” (46). Sin is pretty comedic in the way that she defends her incestuous family, crying out to stop the potential battle between Satan and Death:

O Father, what intends thy hand, she cry'd
Against thy only Son? What fury O Son,
Possesses thee to bend that mortal Dart,
Against thy Fathers head? (2.727-730)

This is an absurd family tree, but the point of this passage is not to insult Sin's family; this passage introduces us to Sin's language, a language that seems strangely emotional. Satan is surprised by this outcry as well, observing first “thy words so strange” then a few lines later, “what thing thou art, thus double-form'd” (2.737, 741). Instead of questioning her appearance, he questions her elocution. Even for Satan, Sin's personality and diction do not reflect her corporeal form, so the juxtaposition of sight and sound is startling. This juxtaposition does not undermine her gender though; instead Sin's language towards Satan and her son reflects her role in their “family.”

Maureen Quilligan, in her chapter “The Gender of the Reader” discusses how the politics of a particular readership influences the reception of a text. She then emphasizes the changing definition of the Protestant family in terms of the differentiation of work, stating that “women's work is to be no longer physically productive for the new marketplace—or even preeminently reproductive—but psychologically and spiritually supportive of another's work” (Quilligan 176-177). Quilligan uses these ideas to discuss the complicated marriage politics in *The Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost*, focusing on Adam and Eve in the latter. This concept of womanly support is relevant to Sin as well. When Satan discloses his plan against mankind, Sin and Death rejoice. Sin then explains her logic for choosing Satan over god and proceeds to praise Satan's work:

Thou art my Father, thou my Author, thou
My being gav'st me; whom should I obey

But thee, whom follow? thou wilt bring me soon
 To that new world of light and bliss, among
 The Gods who live at ease, where I shall Reign
 At thy right hand voluptuous, as beseems
 Thy daughter and thy darling, without end. (2.864-870)

Sin is about to open the gates for her father/lover, which could be construed as physically productive for the fallen angels, but this speech focuses on her psychological support for Satan's enterprise. As Quilligan states, there is a change in familial support in Renaissance England, but the subject of this change is women. Sin, as essentially Satan's wife, supports her husband, and continues to support him throughout the poem. Sin is also Satan's daughter, and, without making too bold of a biographical claim, Milton could be applying his familial experience onto this female. Nonetheless, the language used by Sin towards her "family" reflects the climate of Milton's England, and definitely reflects Sin's position as woman.

With regard to Sin's physical relationship with Satan, her incestuous behavior reaffirms her personal dedication to her sire. She begins her story by describing her cephalic birth from Satan in Heaven, emphasizing her "attractive graces" which seduce Satan. Satan copulates with Sin, and initially her preoccupation is not with the act, but the joy of the act. Sin is entirely concerned with her appearance, and how Satan perceives her. When Satan questions her outcry, she responds: "Hast thou forgot me then, and do I seem/ Now in thine eye so foul, once deemed so fair/ In Heav'n...?" (2. 747-749). She is not particularly concerned with the fact that he does not remember giving birth to her; she is concerned that Satan does not remember her appearance. Now, being vain is not a specifically female attribute, but her vanity does correspond with her sexuality, and allegorize Satan's moment of sin as lust. This allegorization follows James 1:15 "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished bringeth forth death." This is a tenuous connection though, because Satan commits other sins (Pride, Envy,

etc.), and from the text, Sin seems more interested in Satan's affection than he is of her. Satan is more preoccupied with the elevation of the Son, since Raphael states that

With envie against the Son of God, that day
Honour'd by his great Father, and proclaim'd
Messiah King anointed, could not beare
Through pride that sight & thought himself impair'd. (5. 662-665)

This passage aligns Satan's prime sins with envy and pride, whereas Sin interprets his prime sin as lust. This disconnect in their relationship also emphasizes the strangeness of this situation: Satan had sex with an allegorical personification. This is a very bold move for Milton, and one that appears unprecedented in literature. Even in Spenser, moments of physical amorousness involving allegorical personifications are never actually consummated. Una never actually has sex with any one, and despite the temptation Redcrosse feels in Book 1, he does not give in. So Milton's—technically Sin's—emphasis on her sex with Satan is startling, and this seems to underscore her gender.

What is more startling is the fact that Milton continues Sin's narrative with another sex scene. After she falls into Hell, she gives birth to Death, who then chases and rapes her. This assault produces the barking dogs that kennel inside of her. Sin's body is now fully transformed at this point in her story: "of that rape begot/ These yelling Monsters that with ceaseless cry/ And hourly born" (2. 794-796). Sin's position as the victim of the rape reemphasizes her female position in the poem. As Jocelyn Catty says in her book *Writing Rape, Writing Women in Early Modern England*, Early Modern male writers troped "female beauty as responsible for rape, and the idea that rape pollutes the victim" (11). Sin as a character is a product of multiple sexual intercours, her beauty arousing both males, and the acts polluting her physically. Catty's historical perception of rape as a means of female subjugation also seems biblically warranted as well. The James verse ascribes sin with lust, but Ecclesiasticus associates women with sin. He

says in Chapter 25 “from a woman sin had its beginnings, and because of her we all die” By beginning the verse with a prepositional phrase the reader gets to choose an interpretation. One could read it as “sin had its beginnings *from a woman*,” as in sin was born of woman. One could also read it as “*starting* from a woman, sin had its beginnings.” Either interpretation blames women for sin, but the second interpretation follows Milton’s narrative of Sin. The other half of the verse also relates to Milton’s account: Sin (along with the Fall itself) brings Death into the world. This verse seems to condense the entire female narrative which the reader gets from Sin.

The presence of Sin is problematic in *Paradise Lost*. This is not because of her ontological status, or her allegorical form; instead, Sin is problematic because she is a woman, and she is introduced first. Imagine that you are reading *Paradise Lost* for the first time: In Book I, you are introduced to the argument and the theodicy. This introduction might solidify expectations for the rest of the poem based on the reference to our collective “Grand Parents,” and direct your expectations towards Eden, Adam, and Eve. After this initial thought, Book I would continue the Eden narrative, by starting *in medias res*, and continuing the story of how Satan will corrupt mankind. This narrative does not disappear in Book II, but you might be jarred by the introduction of Sin and Death. They are a strange couple, but the most jarring aspect of this scene would be the complete femininity of Sin. Based on your initial expectation in Book I, Eve should be the first woman—and only woman in the Genesis account. Sin’s presence, instead, shakes that structure, affecting not only the gender dynamics of the poem, but also affecting later readings of Eve.

From my analysis then, there are two women in *Paradise Lost*: Sin and Eve. Typically, scholars treat Eve as the only female in the poem, thus building a gender politic around her and her relationship with Adam. This treatment is acceptable considering Eve is ostensibly more

important than Sin in the grand scheme of things, but it limits the complete gender politics of the poem, because Sin has a comparable relationship with Satan. One could make the claim that Sin's ontology, or her position as an allegorical personification does not map onto Eve as the first female human, but comparisons of Adam and Satan, and Adam and the Son contradict this claim. Satan and the Son are ontologically different than Adam in the same way that Sin and Eve are ontologically different. For the rest of this chapter, I will compare Sin and Eve in an attempt to establish a better understanding of Milton's perceptions of Eve, and more broadly, women. This will be a productive comparison simply because readers are introduced to Sin first. Instead of perceiving gender dynamics just from a prelapsarian Eve, readers experience Sin, a fallen woman, before the actual Fall.

Just as Milton does, I will begin with the Bible. In Genesis, after Adam and Eve have eaten of the fruit, God punishes them for their disobedience. To Adam he curses the ground, but to Eve he says: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire *shall be* to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Gen 3:16). Sin is not in the biblical account, but 'sin' is introduced to the world in Genesis 4:7. After God disrespects Cain's offering, Cain "was very wroth, and his countenance fell" (Gen 4:5). God then warns Cain: "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee *shall be* his desire, and thou shalt rule over him" (Gen 4:7). The pronoun for a semi-allegorical 'sin' is masculine here (it is obviously not the fully formed Sin of the poem), but readers should compare the language of Eve's punishment to that of God's warning to Cain. For Eve, her "desire *shall be* to [her] husband, and he shall rule over thee." In Cain's version, he is actually in the grammatical position of Adam as husband, and sin is in the grammatical position of Eve: "and unto [Cain] *shall be* [sin's] desire, and [you, Cain] shalt rule

over [sin].” The Geneva Bible glosses these lines in a different way, interpreting the verse as “unto thee [Abel’s] desire *shall be subject*” but the pronouns are not explicit enough for this interpretation to be the only one. In my mapping, Adam is to Eve, as Cain is to sin, and both Eve and sin are in positions of subjugation, or in biblical terms: female positions. For Milton, Genesis 4:7 could be his justification for Sin’s gender in *Paradise Lost*, and it also seems to influence her role as gatekeeper of Hell, for “sin lieth at the door.” In this way, a comparison between Sin and Eve in the poem has its origins in Genesis, providing Milton and readers with a more complex gender dynamic.

The comparison of subjective language describing Eve and sin in the Bible allows readers to associate that position with the female form, but Milton utilizes other parallels in the poem which associate Eve and Sin. In Sin’s birth narrative she specifically assigns her cephalic birth to the left side of Satan’s head, compared to Eve who is created from Adam’s left side (2.755, 4.485, 8.465). The left side of Adam’s body contains his heart, but the left side becomes problematic for Eve when it is associated with Sin’s birth and its Latin origin from *sinister*. *Sinister* meant left, or left-hand in Latin, and so the left side of something implies the modern sense of sinister. These birth accounts also illuminate the similar subjugated states of both women. Once Satan convinces Sin of his plan, Sin reasons: “Thou art my father, thou *my author*, thou/ My being gav’st me; whom should I obey/ But thee, whom follow?” (2.864-866 emphasis mine). Sin’s three-fold logic of subjugation reflects Eve’s logic towards obeying Adam. Eve first describes Adam as her “Head,” and her “Author” (4.443, 4.635). These examples imply the typical arguments for female subjugation prescribed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:3, which states “but I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of every woman *is* the man; and the head of Christ *is* God.” Despite the biblical precedent for “the head of every

woman,” within the framework of *Paradise Lost*, this logic physically manifests itself in the cephalic birth of Sin, and further connects the gender of Eve with the wicked gender of Sin. Even the logic of obedience connects these two women: Eve says “what [Adam] bidd’st/ Unargued I obey, so God ordains;/ God is thy law, thou mine” (4.365-367). Eve directly obeys Adam who gave her being, while Adam obeys God. In the same way, Sin directly obeys Satan who gave her being, while Satan (should) obey God.

Another parallel between these women, relates to the discrepancies in their multiple birth narratives, and the implications of each narrative. The first birth narratives that the readers acquire come directly from the women. Sin relates hers in Book II, and Eve relates hers in Book IV. These first-hand accounts should be enough for the women, but Milton provided other accounts of these stories, which vary drastically. Sin’s second account, or should I say lack thereof, comes from Raphael’s description of the angelic war. Raphael says that when God anoints the Son, Satan

could not beare
Through pride that sight, & thought himself impaired.
Deep malice thence conceiving and disdain,
Soon as midnight brought on the duskie houre
Friendliest to sleep and silence, he resolv’d
With all his Legions to dislodge, and leave
Unworshipt, unobey’d the Throne supream
Contemptuous, thus to [Beelzebub] in secret spake.” (5.664-671)

Technically, this moment should also describe the birth of Sin, because she places her own birth after the Son is anointed, but Raphael seems to be avoiding that bit of the story. He does use the word “conceiving,” which could imply physical conception, as well as mental conception, and he assigns the objects “Deep Malice” and “disdain” to the verb. These objects could be Raphael’s acknowledgement of Sin, but it is only implied; if he is implying anything, it is the birth of sin, and not Sin. Thus the allegory is lost in Raphael’s account. Eve, on the other hand, has a more

explicit variety between her two narratives. In Book IV, readers receive her first-hand account, but Adam tells a different story in Book VIII. God puts Adam to sleep, and while dreaming he sees God forming a creature beside him. When he wakes, though:

Shee disappeered, and left me dark, I wak'd
 To find her, or for ever to deplore
 Her loss, and other pleasures all abjure:
 When out of hope, behold her, not farr off,
 Such as I saw her in my dream, adorn'd
 With what all Earth or Heaven could bestow
 To make her amiable: On she came,
 Led by her Heav'nly Maker, though unseen,
 And guided by his voice, nor uninform'd
 Of nuptial Sanctitie and marriage Rites:
 Grace was in all her steps. Heav'n in her Eye,
 In every gesture dignitie and love.
 I overjoyd could not forbear aloud. (8.478-490)

This version is much more positive than Eve's depiction of Adam "with that thy gentle hand/ Seisd mine," and emphasizes subjugation more passively than Eve does (4.488-489). Adam does not say a word in his version because he was so "overjoyd [that he] could not forbear aloud." In Eve's version, Adam cries aloud

Whom fli'st thou? whom thou fli'st, of him thou art,
 His flesh, his bone; to give thee being I lent
 Out of my side to thee, nearest my heart
 Substantial life, to have thee by my side
 Henceforth an individual solace dear;
 Part of my Soul I seek thee, and thee claim
 My other half: (4.482-487)

This moment also contradicts Adam's description of Eve as not "uninformed/ Of nuptial Sanctitie and marriage rites" for Eve seems to imply that Adam had to convince her of their union. All of these different accounts emphasize a confusion regarding female desire or expectation. Raphael and Satan both omit Sin from their memory in an attempt to erase Sin's

agency; whereas Adam omits the fact that he must convince Eve to be with him, in what seems to be an attempt to cover his impotency.

Another minor parallel between Sin and Eve's respective narratives is that they both contain narcissistic allusions. In Eve's narrative, this allusion is much more problematic, and has been addressed by more scholars in an attempt to either implicate Eve as already fallen, or reassess the allusion like Christine Froula does. Froula's article "When Eve Reads Milton: Undoing the Canonical Economy" attempts to do just that: she attempts to demystify the patriarchal literary canon, and focuses on *Paradise Lost* to do so. One of the passages she directly addresses contains Eve's narcissistic allusions. Froula's reassessment of Eve's narrative claims that "the covering trope of narcissism does not entirely suffice to control" and she goes on to explain that the "voice" equates the image with Eve: the image is not a reflection of Eve, but "*is* Eve" (327-328). This is important to Froula because the "voice" leads Eve away from the pool, and away from herself. This article cogently positions *Paradise Lost* and women's role within the patriarchal literary canon, but it does not address Sin's narcissistic moment, nor include Sin in the larger feminist theory. Sin's narcissistic moment is not as pronounced as Eve's, but it still affects the overall perception of women (and perhaps male desire) in the poem. Sin describes Satan's desire for her as such:

but familiar grown,
I pleas'd, and with attractive graces won
The most adverse, thee chiefly, who full oft
Thy self in me thy perfect image viewing
Becam'st enamour'd, (2.761-765).

Satan sees himself in Sin's appearance, and is immediately attracted to beauty that is both his and Sin's. In this way, Sin's narrative diverges from the narcissistic story, to include the incestuous nature of their union. In a way, Milton seems to be expanding the allusion, to imply

that acting on narcissistic desires necessarily becomes incestuous, and will mutate the body. This act and the result of this act cause Sin to mutate, and acquire her snaky tail. Eve on the other hand, does not act upon her desire for her reflection, does not commit incest, and does not mutate. In this way, Froula's argument still obtains, but it is not comprehensive enough to include Sin's narrative.

Until now these examples have all been relatively misogynistic, which is not quite my intention. Sin is indeed portrayed as wicked, but she also seems to suffer physically more than Eve does. This portrayal seems like an aggressive way to introduce fallen childbirth, but Milton ascribes the most violent, painful births to Sin. In this way, Sin's procreative capacities are cancerous. Sin vividly describes her pregnancies:

till my womb,
Pregnant by [Satan], and now excessive grown
At last this odious offspring whom thou seest
Thine own begotten, breaking violent way
Tore through my entrails, that with fear and pain
Distorted, (2.778-782).

This is just her first pregnancy, and already Sin is already fearful of this masculine burden. Her second birth(s) are even more tragic for Sin:

And in embraces forcible and foule
[Death] Ingendring with me, of that rape begot
These yelling Monsters that with ceaseless cry
Surround me, as thou sawst, hourly conceiv'd
And hourly born, with sorrow infinite
To me, for when they list into the womb
That bred them they return, and howle and gnaw
My Bowels, thir repast; then bursting forth
Afresh with conscious terrours vex me round,
That rest or intermission none I find. (2.794-803)

Sin seems to receive the grotesque version of God's punishment of Eve. Sin is constantly experiencing pain and sorrow with each birth, and she is fearful of the products of this forced

union. These “children” crawl back inside her from time to time, and then burst out at their leisure. Eve on the other hand, does not give birth to Cain and Abel in the poem, but God still presents her with the punishment, of which Adam reminds her, saying “to thee/ Pains onely in Child-bearing were foretold,/ And bringing forth, soon recompenc’t with joy,/ Fruit of thy Womb” (10.1050-1053). Adam’s tone here seems quite dismissive, for he compares her “onely” pains, to his continuous land labor. As a reader though, Sin’s grotesque, painful births come first chronologically, so they skew the description of “onely” to that of a horrific foreshadowing of what Eve’s births might actually be like. Eve might be cursed to such pain as Sin because they are both women.

Based on these parallels, readers should now recognize the parallels between Sin and Eve. Sin is the completely fallen woman, one who was forced to fall and tortured in Hell. Her characterization aligns her with the most monstrous of women, while promoting her vanity, sexuality, and incestuousness. Thus her punishment reflects the punishment of all women: “I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire *shall be* to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Gen 3:16). The difference is then that Sin, as the epitome of wicked women, is subjected to the most constantly painful births and the most perverse version of familial obligation. Eve does not fall until Book IX, and so her parallels with Sin depict her as having the most potential to fall. She is not already fallen, just more prone to falling. When Eve does fall, Adam’s diatribe reflects her fallen female state. He exclaims:

Out of my sight, thou Serpent, that name best
 Befits thee with him leagu’d, thy self as false
 And hateful; nothing wants, but that thy shape,
 Like his, and colour Serpentine may shew
 Thy inward fraud, to warn all Creatures from thee
 Henceforth; least that too heav’nly form, pretended

To hellish falsehood, snare them. (10.868-874)

Most readers attribute this language to Satan, but what if the reader compares it with Sin? She is half serpent, and is in league with Satan. Furthermore Eve's "shape/ Like [Satan's]" alludes to Sin's "[Satan's] self in me thy perfect image." Sin also had a "heav'nly form" that initially pretended her "hellish falsehood." This passage is ripe with parallels between (now) fallen women, and exposes the biblical biases against women. In Bernard P. Prusak's chapter "Woman: Seductive Siren and Source of Sin?" he recognizes that biblically, "every woman became an Eve, indicted as the cause of evil and the corrupter of men and angels" and that "Eve is allegorically presented as the virgin who, having been deceived by Satan, 'conceived the word of the serpent and brought forth disobedience and death'" (97, 100). Milton's parallelism seems to go one step further then, by implying that every Eve is Sin, and that both Sin and Eve "conceived the word of the serpent" and brought Death/death into the world.

With the introduction of a female allegorical personification in Book II, Milton's women are already problematic. Sin is not our virtuous Grand Mother, and her overt sexuality and painful childbirths do not bode well for our Edenic heroine. Readers then approach Eve in Book IV with an already Hellish perspective, not necessarily a fallen perspective. Eve's alluring description does not mirror the reader's fallen state, but parallels the poem's female antagonist, who at one point, was also alluring. The parallels are ubiquitous, and once the reader begins identifying what a fallen woman means in Milton's poem, Eve's punishment is all the more frightening. Despite the potential fate of Eve, Milton uses Sin as an example of a fallen woman, at the expense of Sin. This claim might sound heretical, but the modern perception of female bodies is something personal. Milton takes advantage of Sin's character in order to warn women of the dangers of disobedience: do not disobey, Eve, or you will end up like Sin.

Epilogue

When readers approach the Sin and Death episode in Book II of *Paradise Lost*, the initial response is to question everything. Why Sin? Why Death? Why incest? There is no one solution. The interpretive answers to these questions severely complicate the poem's theodicy and cosmology depending on the critical approach. Some scholars wish to read away the agency of Sin and Death, and some wish to reassess their allegory as a prefiguration of their allusions. These interpretations treat the poem deconstructively: as a way of reading external to the text that seems to remove authority from Milton and his readers. Instead, *Paradise Lost* seems to be its own universe, and abide by its own internal rules. It is a poem of seemingly unfallen language and prelapsarian beauty, and a work that assumes more gravity than any other of its time. In this way, Sin and Death become more than allegorical personifications, and their place in the poem has greater implications than just their entrance into Eden. They become legitimate characters in the narrative: characters with agency and free will based on the Father's command. They walk, talk, fall with Satan's army, and Death actually has the power to defeat Satan. Death, instead of Satan, is the Son's true enemy and the result of "all our woe" (1.3). He is more than just an allegory for Milton.

Sin, once she intervenes in the narrative, is also more than just an allegory, and affects more than just our understanding of the final battle. She arrests the masculine tone of the poem, adding an alien female perspective. She is not Eve though, and her characterization makes sure of that. Satan is her father and her lover, and her familial obligations manifest themselves violently as Death and her other progeny. Fair at one end, monstrous at the other, Sin becomes a male nightmare of seduction and corruption. This is the surface characterization of Sin, but her femininity is dangerous for other reasons: since she is the first female readers encounter, our

perception of women in this universe becomes tainted before we even meet Eve. In this way, Sin prefigures women with fallen language and affects the later virtue of Eve.

Milton first describes Eve in the most suspect way possible, using fallen language to address her appearance and her gender:

Her unadorned golden tresses wore/
Dishevel'd, but in wanton ringlets wav'd
As the vine curls her tendrils, which impli'd
Subjection, but requir'd with gentle sway,
And by her yielded, by him best receiv'd,
Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,
And sweet reluctant amorous delay. (4.305-311).

Eve has “dishevel’d” hair and “wanton ringlets,” which she yields to Adam with “coy submission” and “modest pride.” On the surface, this language could just be Satan’s perception of Eve, but even then the reader becomes part of Satan’s party: she just seems so alluring.

Scholars like Stanley Fish, however, would blame the reader for interpreting this passage with a postlapsarian lens, instead of a prelapsarian one. Milton, though, seems to blame his own poem for this language. Within the poem’s structure, this obviously fallen language is the language Milton first uses to describe women. Thus, readers acknowledge the implications of this imagery because Sin’s presence introduces it to the poem. Harkening to the language of Book II, Sin pollutes Eve’s imagery, and begins to implicate our first mother as the true reason for the Fall. Sin’s brief narrative also hearkens to the punishment for the Fall, especially Eve’s punishment: familial subjection and painful labor in childbirth. Sin experienced this punishment in Hell, as Eve will experience it on Earth. In this way, Sin’s presence in *Paradise Lost* is integral, foreshadowing not the fall of man, but the fall of woman.

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